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WHOLE No. 412

PRESIDENT BUTLER ON PRESENT-DAY EDUCATION

(Concluded from page 114)

It is a comfort to know that Dr. Butler does not believe that one subject of study is as profitable as another "provided only it be thoroughly pursued" (30), and that he refuses to admit that there are no knowledges or disciplines of general usefulness and value; and that he will not have School and College education dominated by an economic aim, "rather than by a moral purpose and a broadly economic accomplishment". He adds (30):

... Forty years ago it was properly urged that the educational process be based upon a more complete understanding of psychology. In the interval psychology has demonstrated its capacity to become both frivolous and inconsequent, so that it now makes much difference on what sort of an understanding of psychology the educational process is formulated and carried on. Not everything that calls itself psychology need necessarily be accepted as such.

Dr. Butler next declares (30) that no small part of the social and political disorders which are now so generally discussed is traceable to the destruction through unsound educational methods of that common body of knowledge and intellectual and moral experience which held men together through a community of understanding and of appreciation. A steadily growing unity has been displaced for a chaotic multiplicity.

To the ardent classicist, the concluding pages (32-35) of Dr. Butler's discussion will seem the best part of all this masterly presentation. Even the excellent pages that precede them have scarce prepared us for this superbly climactic conclusion. I wish no words of mine to detract from it, and so I shall quote it intact, adding only that the footnotes attached to the quotation are Dr. Butler's.

That there is shortly to be a widespread reexamination of the value of the ancient classics as educational instruments appears to be indicated by many signs. Some of those who have been most contemptuous of classical study are beginning to doubt the entire wisdom of the extreme positions to which they have been driven. Some of those who have been indifferent are beginning to give evidence of remorse as the results of their indifference are becoming increasingly apparent. The more the subject is examined without passion and in the light of sound principle and wide experience, the more clear does it become that in the study of Latin there is found a quite incomparable discipline for language studies of all sorts; that the embryology of civilization is just as significant and important as the embryology of organic forms, and that this can only be studied under the powerful microscopes provided by the Greek and Latin languages; that no educated citizen of a modern free state can afford to ignore the lessons taught by the Roman Empire, which for

centuries held together in a commonwealth that was both prosperous and contented peoples widely differing in religious faith, in racial origin, and in vernacular speech; and that no achievements of the human spirit and no forms of human expression have surpassed, or even equalled, those of the Greeks in the arts of sculpture and architecture, in poetry and philosophy. It was Benjamin Franklin, an American of the rugged type whose name is not usually associated with classical training or an appreciation of classical learning, who wrote:

"When youth are told that the great men whose lives and actions they read in history spoke two of the best languages that ever were, the most expressive, copious, beautiful; and that the finest writings, the most correct compositions, the most perfect productions of human wit and wisdom are in those languages, which have endured ages and will endure while there are men; that no translation can do them justice or give the pleasure found in reading the originals; that those languages contain all science; that one of them is become almost universal, being the language of learned men in all countries; that to understand them is a distinguishing ornament, they may be thereby made desirous of learning those languages and their industry sharpened in the acquisition of them".

This encomium is couched in terms that were appropriate to the middle part of the eighteenth century when it was written, but in all essentials it is not limited in time.

It is a very practical question how to repair the damage that has been done by growing neglect of the ancient classics for a generation past. This cannot be accomplished in a day, but a beginning toward its accomplishment should no longer be postponed. Perhaps it is worth while to consider whether the city of Athens itself might not become, through world-wide cooperation and the joint effort of scholars and universities in many lands, the effective center of a new Renaissance, of a twentieth century revival of interest in the origins and excellences of man's intellectual and spiritual achievements. Athens is the seat of an admirable university which would perhaps be willing to accept the task of organizing and directing such a movement. There are in Athens excellent schools for the study of ancient Greek civilization, maintained in the name of Great Britain, of France, of the United States, and of Germany. Why should not these schools be brought into a federal relationship, not only with each other, but with the University of Athens, and for a generation to come devote their efforts to arousing a new interest in the civilizations and accomplishments of Greece and Rome? Where else in the world would the environment be at once so inviting and so compelling? The sky, the sea, the hills, the very soil, recall the adjectives of Homer and the similes of the lyric poets. Without moving from his place, the visitor may turn his eye to one spot after another, made famous through human association or human achievement, that will not be forgotten while history endures. Let such a visitor climb the Acropolis at Athens and go down toward sunset to sit at the corner of the Temple of the Wingless Victory, most beautiful

³The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, edited by A. H. Smyth (New York: 1905), II: 394.

and pathetic of ruins. Right in front of him is the scene of the battle of Salamis. Beyond the hills to the right the Persians were beaten back at Marathon, and the history of Western civilization so made possible. In a little grove of trees in the midst of the blue fields in front of him were the Academy of Plato and the Lyceum of Aristotle. The white road stretching across the plain is the highway to Eleusis, while off of it to the left is Sunium. Under the hill is the great theatre in which immortal dramas were read to the delight of the Athenian people. Just below, and almost within a stone's throw, is Mars Hill, where the strident voice of Paul the Apostle may almost be heard thundering out, "Ye men of Athens!" Just beyond, still stand the remains of the very platform from which Demosthenes appealed to the Athenian people to beat back the Macedonian tyrant. All these, and a hundred other scenes and associations of hardly less significance, are within sight. As the western sun sinks to its setting the visitor with a soul will learn both the full significance of the city with the violet crown and what it means to visit the home of a marvelous and a lasting civilization.

Athens could be the capital city of a new kingdom of light, and to its defence and upholding there might go as crusaders high-spirited and ambitious youth from every land, until the broken links in our history of the understanding of civilization are restored. This kingdom would be alight with liberty, for man "secures his freedom by keeping hold always of the past and treasuring up the best out of the past, so that in a present that may be angry or sordid he can call back memories of calm or of high passion, in a present that requires resignation or courage he can call back the spirit with which brave men long ago faced the same evils. He draws out of the past high thoughts and great emotions; he also draws the strength that comes from communion or brotherhood"⁴.

C. K.

WHY LATIN?

The Chairman of the Latin Section asks me to address you, teachers of Latin, just because I myself am not a Latin teacher. To Latinists in the Public Schools, he says, is constantly being put the question, Why Latin? Why not a live subject, or at least a living language? And he feels, I take it, that an answer to this recurrent question could come more convincingly, if not more capably, from one who is not professionally committed to the subject. For my part, I am very glad to raise a voice for a study for which so much can be said.

First of all, the question is a part of a more general query: Why should we have any liberal education at all? Why not simply the technical subjects? Why not convert our Schools into apprentice shops? The just reply is, of course, that we have liberal Schools in order that we may maintain liberalized minds. We happen to live in a democracy; democracy rests its case wholly upon the assumption that its citizens can think freemen's thoughts, responsible for self, fair-minded towards others; and for the maintenance of such a power in society liberal education is the one instrument. Furthermore, it is the liberalism of the *litterae humaniores* which is a vital core of this education,

a liberalism whose essential meaning is acquaintance with human minds engaged in thinking men's thought. Natural science owns a place in liberal training, but it is a place distinctly subordinate. Why study an amoeba when you might be conversing with Socrates? When we come to assess the whole range of human values, heights and depths, can there indeed be a moment's question as to what is "the proper study of mankind"? Certainly for us, who are citizens of a democracy, the axis of our education can be but the one theme, man's discovery of selfcontrol through self-knowledge, of which the record is classic letters. Democracy was a Greek, law a Roman invention; and it is not for nothing that the classical façade and the Roman arch are the external dignities of our public edifices, that the emblems of Justice and the maxims of our law are from the Mediterranean ancients, and that our mottoes of State are inscribed in the Latin tongue. If, then, you are asked, Why Latin? Let your first answer be, *For training in citizenship*, in American citizenship; it is the straightest path.

Perchance, you will be saying, But this is not language; it is history, law, and letters! Precisely; it is history, law, letters, philosophy—the *litterae humaniores*, the study of the human mind at work upon man's great and foundational problems; it is just this which is the most capable training for citizenship that we know. And it is just this that spells *Latin*.

Now in saying this I do not mean again to cant the rote dear to the hearts of teachers of language: that a literature cannot be understood in translation, that, therefore, it must be the *ipsissima verba* or nothing. The measure of truth which is in this contention is generally and often childishly exaggerated. It holds in a very important sense for poetry; it holds again for the more recondite phases of scholarship; beyond these it is of little worth, and it cannot be convincing to the general. But in another and more psychological sense I would maintain that the understanding of things classical should come through study of the classical tongues. Such study is exacting and close; it calls for attention. There is an essential difference in the thinking processes involved in the translation of a text and in the perusal of a translation, even if the result be the same English formulation. Translation is in the creative and active mode of thought, if I may so put it, and it engenders active and creative ideas, ideas which gain a double power from their duplex source. Any act of comparison demands judgment; here, on important matters, if, as should be, important texts are employed, the mind is constantly cultivating its powers of judgment. Furthermore, as every psychologist knows, intensity of effort reacts in mental images at once more intense and more deeply graven: the mind's complexion is the reflection of its hours of application, and its living thought is represented most truly by those thoughts with which we have most directly lived. It is for these psychological reasons that I maintain the pragmatic value of intimacy with the classic tongues: if the thought which the Classics express is worth having, it is worth *getting*;

⁴Gilbert Murray, *Essays and Addresses* (London: 1921), p. 13.

⁵This address was delivered at a meeting of the Latin Section of the Nebraska State Teachers' Association, at Omaha, November 10, 1921.